

# Children Islamic Leadership According to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan: Forming Islamic Characters Through Story Telling

Aliah Bagus Purwakania Hasan <sup>1</sup>, Sudi Raharjo <sup>2</sup>, Sholih Khudin Anam <sup>3</sup>

Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia, Indonesia <sup>1</sup>

Universitas Pekalongan, Indonesia <sup>2</sup>

Universitas Balikpapan, Indonesia <sup>3</sup>

---

## Abstract

Islamic education plays a crucial role in shaping children's character based on Qur'anic values. Abdullah Nashih Ulwan, through his work *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*, emphasizes comprehensive child education covering faith, morality, intellect, and social responsibility as the foundation of Islamic leadership. This study aims to analyze Ulwan's concept of children's Islamic leadership and explain how storytelling serves as an effective pedagogical method for forming Islamic character. Employing a qualitative library research method, the study reviews primary and secondary sources related to Ulwan's educational philosophy. Data were analyzed through content analysis to identify themes connecting leadership principles, moral development, and storytelling in Islamic pedagogy. The findings show that Islamic leadership begins with self-leadership grounded in moral awareness and spiritual discipline. Storytelling functions as an interactive medium to internalize these values, transforming abstract moral lessons into lived experiences. Thus, integrating storytelling into Islamic education can foster empathy, moral reasoning, and self-leadership in children.

---

## Keywords:

Islamic Leadership,  
Character Formation,  
Storytelling.

---

## Corresponding Author:

Aliah Bagus Purwakania Hasan  
Email: [aliah@uai.ac.id](mailto:aliah@uai.ac.id)



This is an open access article under the CC BY license.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays a fundamental role in shaping children's character and personality based on Islamic values. In this context, Abdullah Nashih Ulwan, through his monumental work *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*, emphasizes the importance of comprehensive education that includes the spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, and physical aspects as a means of forming an Islamic character (Tanjung et al., 2024). Ulwan's thoughts assert that children are a divine trust (*amanah*) that must be nurtured with compassion, role modeling, and consistent guidance to grow as believers with noble character (Isnaini et al., 2022). Therefore, Ulwan's educational philosophy remains highly relevant in shaping Islamic leadership qualities among children amidst the moral and spiritual challenges of the modern era (Purnama, 2018).

Islamic leadership in children should not merely be understood as the ability to lead others but as the capacity for self-leadership grounded in Islamic principles (Rezka et al., 2024). A child with Islamic leadership qualities is one who possesses spiritual awareness, moral responsibility, and balanced social skills (Suheili, 2017). Ulwan proposed several effective educational methods to instill these values, including role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, advice, supervision, and educational discipline (Khosiin,

2021). Among these, storytelling stands out as a particularly relevant and engaging approach for children, as it allows Islamic leadership values to be internalized in a joyful and meaningful way (Putri & Mukhlas, 2023).

Storytelling holds great pedagogical value in Islamic education, being rich in moral messages, exemplary models, and spiritual values that can be internalized naturally by children (G. K. Hidayat & Subekti, 2022). According to Ulwan, storytelling forms part of role modeling and advising, which effectively instill faith, ethics, and social responsibility in children (Tafiudin, 2021). Listening to stories about prophets, companions, and Islamic heroes not only entertains but also builds strong Islamic character and leadership traits in children (Agustini, 2019). Hence, storytelling in Ulwan's perspective is an effective strategy for nurturing Islamic leadership values from an early age (Yugo, 2024).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to revitalize Islamic leadership values among children, which are increasingly eroded by popular culture and technological advancement that often neglect moral and spiritual dimensions (G. K. Hidayat & Subekti, 2022). By examining the concept of Islamic leadership in children according to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan, this study contributes to developing a character education paradigm rooted in Qur'anic and Prophetic values that remain relevant in the modern age (Maskuroh & Siswadi, 2023).

Previous research has extensively discussed Ulwan's educational thought, including the relevance of his concepts to character formation in the family (Isnaini et al., 2022), moral education, and role modeling within contemporary Islamic pedagogy (M. S. Hidayat et al., 2024), as well as social education in fostering responsibility and independence in children (Almuhajir, 2021). However, research specifically focusing on Islamic leadership in children through storytelling based on Ulwan's framework remains scarce.

Based on the aforementioned background, this research aims to analyze the concept of Islamic leadership in children according to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan and to explain how storytelling can serve as an effective method for shaping children's Islamic character. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to Islamic education and practical insights for parents, educators, and Islamic educational institutions in nurturing a generation of Muslims who are morally upright, spiritually conscious, and capable of leading themselves and others with Islamic values.

## **METHOD**

### **Type of Research**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a literature study (library research) design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept of Islamic leadership in children according to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan and its relevance to Islamic character formation through storytelling. According to (Moleong, 2021), qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically through descriptive narratives expressed in natural contexts. A literature study, as explained by (Zed, 2018), involves the systematic examination of various written sources to obtain theoretical, conceptual, and historical insights related to the research topic. Therefore, this study analyzes and interprets primary and secondary literature discussing Ulwan's educational thought, particularly regarding child leadership and the method of storytelling in Islamic education.

### **Data Sources**

The data sources in this research consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary source includes Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's main work, *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*, which serves as the fundamental reference for understanding his ideas on child education and Islamic leadership formation. The secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and previous studies relevant to Islamic education, character building, storytelling methods, and children's leadership. The selection of sources was carried out purposively, emphasizing their relevance, credibility, and recency. As suggested by (Sugiyono, 2018), purposive selection in qualitative research ensures that only sources providing deep and contextually appropriate information are included to achieve comprehensive analysis.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The data collection technique used in this research is documentary study, which involves reading, reviewing, taking notes, and organizing data obtained from various literature sources. Each document was analyzed to identify ideas, concepts, and patterns within Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's educational philosophy related to developing Islamic leadership in children. Creswell (2018) states that document analysis in qualitative research is conducted to identify key ideas, themes, and conceptual relationships that help explain a phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2021). Accordingly, the researcher examined various academic sources in Arabic, Indonesian, and English that are relevant to the research focus.

### **Data Analysis Method**

The data analysis in this research uses content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic and objective method for examining the meaning contained within texts to identify conceptual structures and values (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis process followed three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

1. Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying information relevant to the main focus of this study—namely, the concept of Islamic leadership in children and the use of storytelling as a method of character education according to Ulwan.
2. Data display involved organizing findings into thematic categories such as principles of Islamic leadership, moral and spiritual character development, and the educational function of storytelling.
3. Conclusion drawing aimed to interpret the findings to uncover the meaning and implications of Ulwan's concepts for the formation of Islamic character in children in the context of contemporary education.

This analytical framework allowed the researcher to conduct a comprehensive and systematic examination of Ulwan's thoughts, ensuring that the study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of Islamic education, especially in the development of children's leadership and character formation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept of Islamic Leadership in Children According to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan**

Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's pedagogical framework for child education is deeply rooted in the classical Islamic understanding that *leadership (qiyādhah)* is first and foremost a moral responsibility rather than mere social authority. In his seminal work *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*, Ulwan emphasizes that every child — as a future adult and agent of society — should develop *self-leadership (qiyādat al-dhāt)* that enables them to govern their own behavior in accordance with Islamic moral and spiritual norms. This notion aligns

with Islamic educational theory that views *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) and *akhlaq* (ethics) as foundational for human development (Isnaini et al., 2022).



**Figure 1.** Model of Islamic Leadership Formation in Children According to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan

Ulwan does not limit Islamic leadership to later stages of life; rather, he argues that leadership begins with internalized moral values that guide decision-making, self-restraint, compassion, and responsibility. This echoes broader Islamic pedagogical principles that frame education not only as cognitive transmission but as transformation of the whole person, integrating spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions.

According to Ulwan, children should be nurtured through *seven integrated educational dimensions* — faith, moral behavior, intellect, social interaction, physical wellbeing, emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness — that collectively produce a *balanced personality (insān kamil)*. This multi-dimensional framework parallels contemporary Islamic education models that emphasize holistic child development and moral agency (Tanjung et al., 2024).

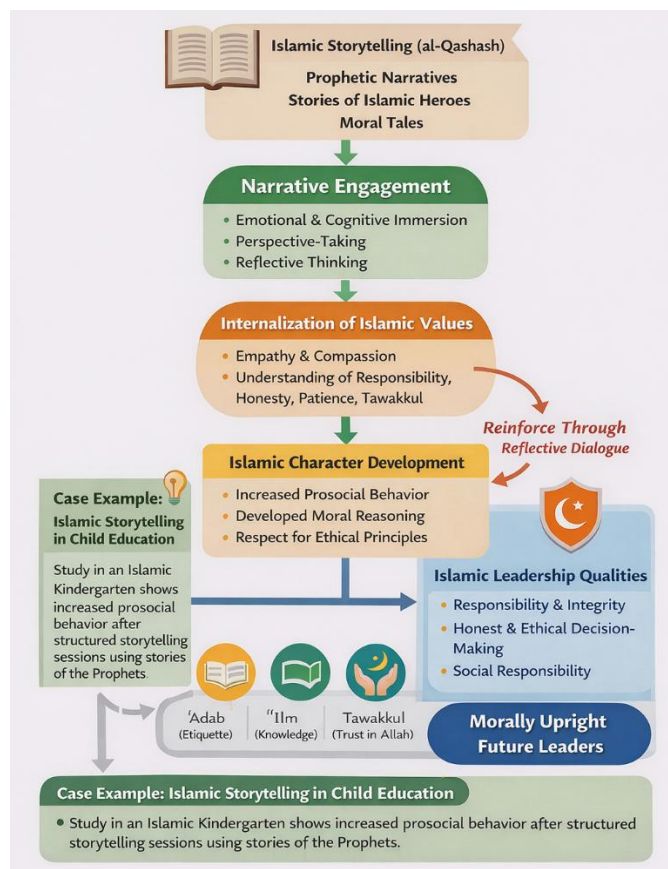
A central element in Ulwan's concept is the role of parents and educators as *uswah hasanah* (model examples). Ulwan insists that children learn leadership primarily through *observation and habituation* of ethical conduct modeled by adults, rather than by rote instruction alone. This aligns with social learning theory, where children internalize moral behavior through observation of trusted role figures (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Fithriani et al., 2021). The implications are clear: without adult exemplars in the home and classroom, children's moral development is likely to be inconsistent or superficial.

A real-world educational challenge underscores Ulwan’s concern: recent studies across Muslim societies highlight rising behavioral challenges among youth, including disregard for religious duties, peer conflict, and impulsive decision-making. For example, research on character formation in Islamic schools shows that when leadership exemplars are absent, students often struggle with internalizing ethical norms, leading to issues such as dishonesty or low responsibility in school and community contexts.

In response, some educational programs — particularly in Islamic elementary schools — have implemented structured leadership and character curricula rooted in Islamic values. These programs report improvements in students’ self-discipline, respect for others, and moral reasoning, demonstrating that intentional moral cultivation from an early age can produce measurable behavioral shifts. These outcomes lend empirical support to Ulwan’s premise that ethical leadership development must begin in childhood and be sustained through consistent moral modeling (Arif et al., 2024; Irpan & Sain, 2024).

### The Role of Storytelling in Shaping Islamic Character and Leadership

Storytelling (*al-qashash*) is widely recognized in both Islamic educational practice and modern pedagogical theory as a powerful tool for moral and socio-emotional development in children. In the context of Islamic education, storytelling does more than entertain: it introduces moral lessons through narrative scenarios that children can emotionally and cognitively relate to, which can enhance moral reasoning and ethical behavior (László & Ehmann, 2013; Liang et al., 2025).



**Figure 2.** Diagram of Storytelling’s Role in Developing Islamic Leadership in Children

From an educational psychology perspective, narrative engagement plays a critical role in sociomoral development because it allows children to imagine themselves in the situations of story characters, encouraging *perspective-taking*, *empathy*, and reflective thinking (Bruner, 1991). This aligns with Ulwan's view that stories — especially *prophetic stories* and biographies of Islamic exemplars — serve as vicarious experiences where children witness moral choices and consequences within culturally and religiously meaningful contexts.

In Islamic pedagogical settings, narrative content often revolves around tales of the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophets of the Qur'an, whose lives illustrate virtues such as *honesty*, *patience*, *justice*, and *servanthood to Allah*. Research on Islamic storytelling demonstrates that such narratives help children internalize abstract Islamic values, making them more concrete and actionable in daily life. For example, studies in early childhood Islamic education report that using stories about Prophet Muhammad's honesty or Prophet Ibrahim's dedication significantly improves children's understanding of these virtues and promotes their moral behavior in classroom settings.

In a study conducted at an Islamic kindergarten, teachers implemented structured storytelling sessions using prophetic narratives over several weeks. The observed outcomes showed that children who participated in these sessions demonstrated an increase in pro-social behaviors such as *sharing*, *helping others*, and *verbal expressions of empathy*, compared to baseline observations. Teachers noted that children began to reference story characters when resolving minor conflicts, indicating internalization of moral lessons. Although this study was classroom-based and not randomized, it reflects how storytelling in Islamic contexts can shape children's moral decision-making and social interactions (Storytelling and Role-Playing Methods study).

From a theoretical standpoint, narrative-based pedagogy supports moral and leadership development by connecting emotional experience with cultural and ethical frameworks. Research in moral development indicates that children's exposure to moral stories with positive outcomes (e.g., honesty leads to praise and trust) can significantly promote ethical behavior such as honesty and fairness (Liang et al., 2025). Moreover, engaging children in reflective dialogue following stories enhances their ability to interpret motives and consequences, which are foundational for *ethical leadership reasoning*.

In the framework of Islamic leadership education, storytelling reinforces the core Islamic values underlying effective leadership, such as *adab (etiquette)*, *'ilm (knowledge)*, *tawakkul (trust in Allah)*, and *responsibility*. By witnessing these values embodied in exemplary figures through narrative, children begin to shape their own moral compass and social agency in ways that extend beyond memorization, fostering identity as future leaders grounded in faith and ethics.

### **Integrating Leadership and Storytelling in Character Education**

Integrating Islamic leadership education with storytelling reflects a holistic pedagogical model that synthesizes *ethical reasoning* and *emotional engagement* within character formation. In this framework, leadership without moral grounding risks fostering authority without conscience, while storytelling alone may entertain without imparting ethical purpose. An integrated model ensures that children not only learn *what* values are but also *why* and *how* they matter in real life — aligning cognitive understanding with affective commitment. This dual emphasis corresponds to contemporary research in moral education, which argues narratives help learners connect principles with lived experiences and emotional contexts, fostering deeper moral reasoning and ethical awareness. Narratives serve as "*ethical mirrors*", allowing children to explore moral dilemmas and leadership scenarios safely and reflectively, rather than through abstract or didactic instruction alone.



**Figure 3.** Integrated Model of Islamic Leadership and Storytelling in Character Education

Storytelling reinforces moral and leadership values in several ways:

1. **Emotional Engagement:** Stories activate empathy and perspective-taking, enabling children to *feel* the consequences of virtuous and non-virtuous actions. This emotional resonance supports internalization of leadership traits like honesty, responsibility, and compassion (e.g., empathy with protagonists facing ethical choices).
2. **Context-rich Scenarios:** Narratives embed moral dilemmas within relatable contexts, making abstract leadership principles concrete. For example, tales of trustworthy figures or heroes overcoming adversity provide *models of moral agency* that children can imitate and adapt to real life.
3. **Reflective Moral Reasoning:** Research in narrative pedagogy finds that storytelling invites learners to engage in internal dialogue and reflection about choices, which is a critical precursor to ethical leadership decision-making.

A real-world case in Indonesia illustrates this integration: *Learning with Light: Integrating Islamic Character Education into Multimedia Storytelling at Rural Elementary Schools* found that when teachers used digital storytelling featuring Islamic moral tales (stories of prophets, companions, and ethical scenarios), students not only learned values such as honesty and responsibility but also reported *increased personal commitment* to these values in classrooms and daily interactions. The implementation also involved community and parent participation, reinforcing consistent moral environments beyond the classroom.

Another example from primary schooling research shows that project-based digital storytelling can enhance empathy, discipline, and responsibility by engaging students in creating their own narrative projects where leadership is not just taught but *performed*. These projects require students to practice planning, cooperation, and ethical reflection — skills directly related to leadership formation.

Empirical psychological research supports the theoretical claim that moral narratives affect behaviour directly. For instance, field experiments demonstrated that moral stories emphasizing positive outcomes of honesty significantly increased honest behaviour in children aged 7–10 compared with control groups, indicating that narratives can shape specific ethical behaviours foundational for leadership integrity.

Taken together, these findings show that leadership development through storytelling is not merely about transmitting facts or values; it aligns cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of moral education. Stories act as *contextual bridges*, linking normative ideals to lived experience, while leadership frameworks provide direction and internal coherence so that children can transfer moral lessons into purposeful action.

In the context of Islamic education, this integration resonates with prophetic pedagogy, where the Qur'an and Hadith use narrative forms (e.g., stories of the prophets) to teach deep moral truths. By coupling these narratives with reflective pedagogical strategies, educators create a synergistic model where storytelling becomes a vehicle for *transformative leadership education* rather than mere moralizing.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's concept of children's Islamic leadership emphasizes moral and spiritual self-governance as the essence of true leadership. Leadership begins with nurturing inner discipline, sincerity, and social responsibility through the integration of faith and moral education. Storytelling plays a vital role as a method for shaping children's Islamic character because it connects emotion, cognition, and behavior through moral narratives that children can easily internalize.

## Practical Recommendations

Islamic educators and parents should actively apply storytelling methods using prophetic stories, companions' lives, and contemporary Islamic role models to develop leadership and ethical awareness. Teacher training programs in Islamic education should include modules on narrative pedagogy, encouraging reflective discussions after storytelling sessions to strengthen children's moral reasoning.

## Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should explore empirical evidence on the impact of storytelling-based Islamic leadership programs in different educational levels. Comparative research across Islamic schools in various cultural contexts could provide deeper insights into how narrative-based approaches shape children's spiritual intelligence and leadership development.

## REFERENCES

- Agustini, S. (2019). The Concept Of Child Education In A Harmonious Family According To Wahbah Zuhayli And Abdullah Nashih Ulwan. *Tawazun: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 10(1), 89–99.
- Almuhajir, A. (2021). Concept Analysis of the Tarbiyatul Aulā d FĀ «Al-IslĀ m Abdullah Nashih Ulwan: Children's Social Education Paying Attention to the Rights of Others in Forming Independent

- Character. *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman*, 32(2), 205–222.
- Arif, M., Chapakiya, S., & Dewi, A. Y. (2024). Character Education in Indonesia Islamic Elementary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review (2014-2024). *J-PAI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 11(1).
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1). Prentice hall Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1–21.
- Creswell, J. W. (2021). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE publications.
- Fithriani, F., Syabuddin, S., Gunawan, G., Zainuddin, T., & Sulaiman, S. (2021). Teacher as a role model in the 2013 curriculum development. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 21(2), 240–256.
- Hidayat, G. K., & Subekti, M. Y. A. (2022). PENERAPAN KITAB TARBIYAH AL-AULĀD FĪ AL-ISLĀM KARYA ABDULLAH NASHIH ULWAN DALAM MENDIDIK ANAK DI ERA DIGITAL. *Journal Islamic Studies*, 3(2), 52–64.
- Hidayat, M. S., Fitri, R. A., Yusuf, Y., Mardiyanto, A., Mustofa, E., & Jaenullah, J. (2024). The Exemplary Method and Its Urgency in Moral Education According to the Perspective of Abdullah Nashih Ulwan. *Assyfa Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2(2), 123–130.
- Irpan, I., & Sain, Z. H. (2024). The Crucial Role of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping Children's Character: Psychological and Spiritual Review. *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama*, 16(1), 383–392.
- Isnaini, M., Amelia, P. R., & Ballianie, N. (2022). Abdullah nashih ulwan's perspective of child education concepts and its relevance to religious character formation in the family environment. *Tadrib: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8(2), 224–244.
- Khosiin, N. (2021). Metode Penanaman Pendidikan Islam pada Anak Menurut Abdullah Nashih Ulwan. *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset Dan Kajian Keislaman*, 10(2), 177–190.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.
- László, J., & Ehmann, B. (2013). Narrative social psychology. In *Social cognition and communication* (pp. 205–227). Psychology Press.
- Liang, M., Wang, Q., & Zhou, Y. (2025). The influence of different types of moral stories on honest behaviour in children. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(2), 178.
- Maskuroh, L., & Siswadi, S. (2023). Basic Characteristics of Educators in Educating Children According to Islam. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 6(7).
- Moleong, L. J. (2021). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Purnama, S. (2018). Abdullah Nashih 'Ulwan's technological contribution toward the development of Islamic early childhood education. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 7(1), 47–77.
- Putri, F. R., & Mukhlas, A. A. (2023). Memahami Metode Pendidikan Akhlak dalam Perspektif Islam: Perbandingan Pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali dan Abdullah Nashih 'Ulwan. *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 2(2), 223–237.
- Rezka, A. G., Subandi, S., & Amiruddin, A. (2024). The Concept of Children's Faith Education (Comparative Study Abdullah Nashih Ulwan and Zakiah Daradjat Thoughts). *Bulletin of Science Education*, 4(1), 102–121.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Suheili, A. (2017). *Metode pendidikan karakter dalam keluarga menurut Abdullah Nashih Ulwan dalam Kitab Tarbiyah Al Aula d̄ Fi Al-Islam*. IAIN Padangsidimpuan.
- Tafiudin, M. (2021). Children Education in the Book of Tarbiyatul Aulad Fil Islam Based on Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's and Philosophy of Education Perspectives. *Tadibia Islamika*, 1(1), 21–32.
- Tanjung, Y. F., Gea, Y., & Ok, A. H. (2024). Relevansi Pemikiran Pendidikan Abdullah Nashih Ulwan dalam Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer. *Tarbiatuna: Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 4(2), 723–735.

- Yugo, T. (2024). Reasonable Education in the Book of Tarbiyatul Aulad by Abdullah Nashih Ulwan and Its Implications in Modern Education. *Maklumat: Journal of Da'wah and Islamic Studies*, 2(3), 147–166.
- Zed, M. (2018). *Metode penelitian kepustakaan*. Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.